**Government 372**

**Interstellar Relations: The Politics of Speculative Fiction**

**(Departmental Seminar)**

**Version 1.0**

Wednesdays, 11.00am-1.30pm, White-Gravenor 411

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Authors writing in the Science Fiction/Speculative Fiction (SF) genre have long explored political themes—such as the rise and decline of empires, the impact of technological change on individual liberty, the nature of revolutionary struggles, the workings of totalitarianism, and the impact of socio-political collapse on humankind.

This seminar approaches their works as social-scientific, political-theoretic, and social-theoretic texts. Readings include SF novels, as well as scholarly texts on politics and society. Students also watch and discuss films and videos. This is not a literature course. We spend virtually no time on the emergence of SF, its conventions, or its history; we do not read literary criticism of SF or related genres. Instead, we approach SF as an opportunity for ontological displacement and a landscape of the imaginary that allows us to contemplate contemporary socio-political concerns.

Government 372 is a Departmental Seminar. Department Seminars feature intense class discussion and substantial reading and writing assignments, designed to help students write persuasively on political topics. As such, it fulfills the College’s requirement for one “Integrated Writing” course in the major.

## Readings and Class Participation

Although I will occasionally give short lectures, the class is taught primarily as a seminar. Students contribute to the intellectual and educational life of the class via participation in class discussions and small-group exercises. I expect students to complete all of the readings most of the time. Because the reading load is heavy, you will need to plan accordingly, and space assignments out over the week before each class.

Class participation takes two forms. First, engagement in in-class discussions. Second, online engagement in group discussions on Canvas. Together, they total 40 percent of your final grade. These are somewhat fungible. That is, if you find it difficult to participate in class, or get excited about something but find the conversation moves on, you can exceed the minimum requirements for the online component to compensate.

* The in-class component should not require much explanation. Students should regularly contribute to class in an informed manner. This does not require a stream of brilliant insights or extemporaneous speaking. A simple “I’m not sure I agree, what about [this passage]” or “I don’t entirely follow that, would you rephrase” often contributes a great deal.
* The online component will proceed through group discussions on Canvas. On September 18 I will divide the class into three groups on Canvas. Every week will bring a new “discussion” for each group, which should function like a group reading journal. I will get the ball rolling, but what happens next is up to you. Each student is required to engage a minimum of *twice* by Saturday at 11.59pm and *twice more* by Tuesday at 11.59pm. Think in terms of comments, questions, ideas you’d like to discuss more online or in class, or whatever, Note that this requirement serves as a forcing mechanism spacing out your readings/viewings.

## Essays and Memos

1. Two very short papers (the first is 750 words maximum, excluding references; the second can be up to 1k words, excluding references) due on **September 16** (Monday) by 11.59pm and **22 October** (Tuesday) via Canvas [together 10% of your grade]
2. One memo outlining either (a) three possible research topics or (b) a single research topic if you’re already got one that you’re committed to (750 words maximum) due on **November 3** (Sunday) by 11.59pm via Canvas; comments — just some notes, reactions, and suggestions — on other students’ proposals due **November 10** (Sunday) [together 5% of your grade].
3. One final paper (4-5k words, but longer is okay) due **December 15** (Sunday) by 11.59pm via Canvas [45% of your grade].

The final paper should concern the nexus of politics and SF. The norm is that students will go beyond the class materials, usually in terms of both SF and non-fiction works. Examples of past student papers include the post-apartheid politics of recent South African speculative fiction; representations of genocide in speculative fiction; comparative apocalyptic imaginaries; why science-fiction political systems tend to be federative or imperial; the ethics of human bioengineering as portrayed in specific SF works; and using SF texts to criticize literature on “cyborg feminism.”

All papers should [use Chicago-style author-date](https://www.chicagomanualofstyle.org/tools_citationguide/citation-guide-2.html) for citations

## General Policies

* You are bound by Georgetown’s honor code. Plagiarism or other instances of academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. I put all writing assignments through plagiarism-detection software.
* The subject line of emails to me should begin with “Government 372” This will ensure that they are automatically flagged and make it much less likely that I will miss them. But I do miss emails, and so you should ping me again if you don’t hear from me within 24 hours.

## Learning Goals

* Improved analytic writing skills;
* Better understanding of key political themes addressed in the course; and
* Greater facility at analyzing fictional material in terms of political, political-theoretic, and social-theoretic issues.

## Obtaining Readings

* You are responsible for procuring copies of the books as I have not ordered them through the bookstore.
* Other texts are available via embedded hyperlink
* Films and videos are available online via streaming services (e.g., Amazon, Netflix, Hulu) or from the library.

# Schedule

## September 4 Introduction

### Required

* Jutta Weldes, 2003. “[Popular Culture, Science Fiction, and World Politics: Exploring Intertextual Relations](https://www.dropbox.com/s/h6sm712lwa7dab5/Weldes_Intro.pdf?dl=0),” in Weldes, ed. To Seek Out New Worlds: Exploring Links between Science Fiction and World Politics, pp. 1-27.

### Recommended

* Daniel Drezner, 2014. Theories of International Politics and Zombies,Revived Edition. [If you need a refresher on IR theory, and want to see it applied to SF settings]
* Edward James, 1994. [Science Fiction in the 20th Century](https://www.dropbox.com/s/6s6gwt6bupnagff/James_Intro_and_Chapt1.pdf?dl=0), pp. 12-53. [If you need historical background on SF as a genre]

## September 11 No Class

### Required

* See below

## September 18 Working with SF

### Required

* Iver B. Neumann and Daniel H. Nexon, 2006. “[Introduction: Harry Potter and the Study of World Politics](https://www.dropbox.com/s/09eokdszgyj5u35/Neumann_Nexon_Intro.pdf?dl=0),” in Nexon and Neumann, eds. Harry Potter and International Relations, pp. 1-25. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield.
* J. Furman Daniel III and Paul Musgrave, 2017. “[Synthetic Experiences: How Popular Culture Matters for Images of International Relations](https://www.dropbox.com/s/icuptfg1iw30dlh/Daniel_Synthetic_Experiences.pdf?dl=0),” *International Studies Quarterly*, 61(3): 503-516
* *Star Trek: The Next Generation*, “The Outcast” (Season 5, Episode 17, 1992)
* *Supergirl*, “Man of Steel,” (Season 4, Episode 2, 2018)

### Assignments

* **Essay!** The first essay assignment (750 words) is due on September 16 at 11.59 via Canvas. It must analyze *either* “The Outcast” *or* “Man of Steel” from the perspective of one of the approaches specified in Neumann and Nexon (2006). The essay needs, and at the outset, to make *an argument* —for example, concerning what one of the episodes tells us about the cultural context that produced it. It should then expand on that argument, consider some alternative interpretations or potential problems with your reading, and come to some kind of conclusion about what we learn. You can take a critical stance toward the episode, and you should cite any analysis that you draw upon as well as provide references for any empirical claims you make.
* While you receive a grade for the essay, it’s primary purpose is diagnostic—to give me a sense of your writing and your ability to make a focused analytic argument.
* We will discuss the materials, and probably the arguments that some of you make, in class on September 18.

## September 25 The Hunger Games

### Required

* Susan Collins, 2008. The Hunger Games.
* Paul Musgrave and Daniel Nexon, 2013. “[States of Empire: Liberal Ordering and Imperial Relations](http://www.dhnexon.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/States_of_Empire_Liberal_Ordering_and_In.pdf)” in Dunne et al., Liberal World Orders, pp. 211-230. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
* Susan Birrell, 1981. [“Sport as Ritual: Interpretations from Durkheim to Goffman](https://www.dropbox.com/s/qg06e8h7xb7xquz/Biirrell_Sport.pdf?dl=0).” *Social Forces* 60(2): 354-376.

## October 2 The Player of Games

### Required

* Iain M. Banks, 1991. The Player of Games.
* Cynthia Weber, 1995. [Simulating Sovereignty](https://www.dropbox.com/s/sfvxxarr5pkxm0s/Weber_Simulating_Sovereignty.pdf?dl=0), pp. 30-39. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### Recommended

* Andreas Huyssen, 1989. "[In the shadow of McLuhan: Jean Baudrillard's theory of simulation.](https://www.dropbox.com/s/mg08k9r262wjw5d/Huyssen_Shadow.pdf?dl=0)" *Assemblage* 10: 7-17.

## October 9 Halting State

### Required

* Charles Stross, 2007. Halting State.
* Kevin D. Haggerty and Richard V. Ericson, 2000. “[The Surveillant Assemblage](https://www.dropbox.com/s/qfh2uznle5ev5ay/Haggerty_the_surveillant_assemblage.pdf?dl=0),” *British Journal of Sociology*, 51(4): 605-622.
* Robert Chesney and Danielle Citron, 2019 “[Deepfakes and the New Disinformation War: The Coming Age of Post-Truth Geopolitics](https://www.dropbox.com/s/4l64t3jyt9fnjwv/Chesney_Deepfakes.pdf?dl=0),” *Foreign Affairs* 98(1): 147-155.
* It might be a good idea to start watching *Battlestar Galactica* (2004). You are expected to complete “The Miniseries” and “33” by October 23.

### Recommended

* Arif Ahmer, Leo G. Stewart, and Kate Starbird, 2018.”[Acting the Part: Examining Information Operations Within #BlackLivesMatter Discourse](https://www.dropbox.com/s/szhmbrs6swthze2/BLM-IRA-Camera-Ready.pdf?dl=0),” Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction, Vol. 2, No. CSCW, Article 20.
* Nick Vaughan-Williams, 2010. “[The UK border security continuum: virtual biopolitics and the simulation of the sovereign ban](https://www.dropbox.com/s/4r29uod51figopt/Vaughan-Williams_UK_Border.pdf?dl=0),” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 28: 1071-1083.
* Samuel Parkin, 2019. [“‘Politicians Fear this like Fire’: The Rise of the Deepfake and the Threat to Democracy](https://www.theguardian.com/technology/ng-interactive/2019/jun/22/the-rise-of-the-deepfake-and-the-threat-to-democracy),” *The Guardian*, June 22.

## October 16 Watchmen

### Required

* Alan Moore, 1986-1987. Watchmen.
* Plato, The Republic, Book III, [411b-415c](https://www.dropbox.com/s/r09x74s40x0h4h3/Plato2red.pdf?dl=0) and Book VII, [514-519e](https://www.dropbox.com/s/tqkjl5jte4vubx2/Plato1red.pdf?dl=0).
* Allison Flood, 2014. “[Superheroes a 'cultural catastrophe', says comics guru Alan Moore](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/jan/21/superheroes-cultural-catastrophe-alan-moore-comics-watchmen),” *The Guardian*, January 21. [read *after* Watchmen]
* Art Spiegelman, 2019. “[Golden Age Superheroes were Shaped by the Rise of Fascism](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/aug/17/art-spiegelman-golden-age-superheroes-were-shaped-by-the-rise-of-fascism),” *The Guardian*, August 17. [read *after* Watchmen]

### Assignments

* **Essay!** You must use one of the fictional works we have read or seen as a basis for ruminating either on Schmitt’s notion of sovereignty (the exception) or of politics (the friend/enemy distinction). How does the fictional work track with, illustrate, or deviate from, Schmitt's argument? Can it be read as a criticism of the claim? How, overall, does it inform your reading of Schmitt? Although your essay should address these kinds of questions—and, given space, not many of them—it still needs to be structured as an analytic essay, i.e. make an argument and use its pages to support and defend that argument. 750-1k words. Due on October 22, 11.59pm.
* There is no mandatory online discussion this week.

## October 23 Sovereignty and Politics

### Required

* Carl Schmitt, [1932]. [The Concept of the Political](https://www.dropbox.com/s/pbhtl8jevjue5ze/Carl_Schmitt%20-%20The_Concept_of_the_Political.pdf?dl=0). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.
* Carl Schmitt, [1922]. [Political Theology,](https://www.dropbox.com/s/c9ilhhf7x0p4vo0/schmitt-political-theology.pdf?dl=0) Parts 1 and 4. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
* You need to have finished watching *Battlestar Galactica* (2004), “Miniseries” and “33”.

## October 30 Embassytown

### Required

* China Miéville, 2011. Embassytown.

## November 6 Dawn

### Required

* Octavia Butler, 1987. Dawn.

## November 13 Conquest of America

### Required

* Tzevtan Todorv, 1999. The Conquest of America: The Question of the Other.
* Star Trek: The Next Generation “Darmok” (Season 5, Episode 2, 1991).

## November 20 No Class

### Required

* Work on your final papers.
* This is the week to send me outlines or overview of your papers, via email. I will try to respond soonest possible.

### Recommended

* Ann Leckie, 2013. Ancillary Justice.
* I’ll put up a discussion thread for anyone who does read it.

## November 27 Starship Troopers

### Required

* Robert Heinlein, 1959. Starship Troopers.
* Ronald R. Krebs, 2004. “[A School for the Nation? How Military Service Does Not Build Nations, and How it Might](https://www.dropbox.com/s/bhz19zleu304fun/Krebs_School_Nation.pdf?dl=0),” *International Security* 28(4): 85-124.

### Recommended

* *Starship Troopers* (1997), directed by Paul Verhoeven.

## December 4 The Dispossessed

### Required

* Ursula K. LeGuin, 1974. *The Dispossessed: An Ambiguous Utopia*.

## TBD Makeup Class